

IT GETS DONE

a friend of mine, george carroll,
has this phrase, "it gets done."
he means it in the sexual realm,
that before the bar closes
you will somehow end up with a woman.
it always does seem to be the case for him.
somehow it never happens to me.

but i like the extension of his idiom
into other areas, like writing.
if you're a writer, the writing gets done.
if you're not a writer, it doesn't.
the non-writer can cite innumerable valid reasons
why it isn't getting done,
such as wives, kids, jobs, distractions,
unconducive working conditions, broken typewriters,
and the heartbreak of unrelenting rejections.
the writer will,
in spite of all of the above,
write.
no, let me return to the periphrastic passive:
it gets done -- no one quite knows how.

THE THINKER

for years i received a rand calendar each december.
it was sent with the compliments of a name
that sounded familiar but that i couldn't
quite place. maybe the married name, i figured,
of one of my former students, and i always made
a mental note to send a thank-you letter.

one day i learned that it was quite an honor
to be on the mailing list for rand calendars.
i'd always liked mine, had always put it up
on my office wall where i pasted back the
individual months with masking tape. there
were inspiring quotations from great men
(and, in recent years, a great woman also)
and there was plenty of space for writing
in a day's appointments.

i began to fantasize that maybe
i was being sized up as a potential
thinker for the think tank. i could
see myself sitting around all day at
a comfortably messy desk deciding whether
or not it was cost-efficient to drop

atom bombs on the major mongolian cities
or whether we should just hope for a drought.

in fact, i finally took it upon myself to send
that long overdue thank-you note.

i even enclosed a copy of one of my books
of poems, ostensibly as a reciprocation
for the many calendars, but mostly
to demonstrate what a sterling mind i possess.

this december i did not receive a rand calendar.

THE AGE BEFORE ANTIBIOTICS

when i was growing up in the forties
there weren't any immunizations yet
for measles and whooping cough and mumps
and chicken pox, not even for polio.
i didn't get polio, but i got most of the rest.
what made me think of this
is that my kids are home with chicken pox right now,
but they've had shots for all the others,
and they'll probably be back in school in a week.

i was always better in a week too,
but my aunts always prevailed upon my mother
to make me stay home an extra week recuperating
while they took turns taking care of me.
that second week was a bore.
i was an active kid who loved,
if not the confinement of school,
then at least the social and competitive aspects of it.
i suspect the ennui of those second weeks in bed --
the awful daytime radio, the awful reader's digests --
turned me into an early masturbator
and confirmed me as a writer.
i was playing with myself to make the time pass
before there was very much to even get a hold of.

but reading a student's essay the other day
on how she contracted scarlet and rheumatic fever
because a doctor sent her home too soon
from a tonsillectomy,

i remembered that five of my aunts' brother and sisters
had died in a single epidemic week
decades before i was born,